

Proposition

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Proposition

by [Apuzzlingprince](#)

Summary

On his way through Derry, Bill is abducted by a local cult. He ends up in Its arms, who has a proposition for him.

Notes

Just taking a short break from 'Desire, I'm Hungry' to write something a little more lighthearted. It has dark parts, but the ending is light. I wanted to try something different.

Reaching Vermont from New York took approximately five hours by car. From there, one could reach Boston within three, provided they drove fast enough. These were figures Bill had kept in mind before leaving New York to attend a pop culture convention. Had he actually reached his destination, it would have been the first convention he had attended as a guest rather than a fan.

But he hadn't reached it, because he had decided to take a detour through Derry – the town in which he had spent his childhood – and a swarm of people in black cloaks (why did groups of bad guys *always* wear cloaks?) had accosted him while he was parked on the outskirts to the barrens. He'd screamed and swung all his limbs as they pulled him out the driver's seat of his car, attempting to pummel them with his fists and feet, but this hadn't done him much good. The moment they had him on the ground, they'd bound his hands and feet with thick loops of rope and proceeded to carry him down the sloping hills leading to the sewer.

Why they would want to bring Bill into the sewer only occurred to Bill while he was being dragged through an enormous room with towering piles of trash. He remembered this room, and he remembered, vaguely, the horrible events that had taken place here.

"Maybe we shouldn't drop this one down," said one of the cloaked figures. "We never see if it actually takes them when we do that."

"Isn't never seeing them again proof enough?" asked another cloaked figure.

"They might die during the fall," said the first voice. "I mean, it sounds like there's water down there, but maybe they just keep cracking their heads open or something."

"There'd be a pile of bodies down there if that were true," said a new voice. "So they'd be cushioned."

The colour orange fought to the forefront of Bill's frenzied thoughts and he remembered eyes – bright orange eyes with limbal rings of red. They had been accompanied by too-white teeth, as jagged and sharp as bits of glass, and the memory of them triggered a series of jumping shivers.

A clown, he thought. It had been a *clown*.

And It was *alive*.

"L-let me go," he stammered. He'd thought himself over his speech impediment, but even years of therapy, it seemed, wasn't enough to expunge it completely. "People'll know I'm m-missing!" he continued, now yelling. "I'm a famous author, you dumb fucks! P-people'll notice I'm gone!"

"Doesn't matter what you are," said a gruff voice. "No one will think to look here. No one ever looks here."

"My c-car is just outside, they'll see-" The man interrupted him.

“Like I said, no one will think to look here.”

A slice of light provided by a torch cut through the dark and settled upon a pipe opening. Unlike the other pipes Bill had seen, this one went straight down.

He was dropped at the edge of the pipe and made to peer into the black. Even with the torch illuminating the path down, it was impossible to tell how far the drop was. A shiver of fear touched at Bill's spine. He wasn't sure he wanted to survive the descent. He knew what awaited him at the bottom of the pipe, and the thought of being all alone and completely defenceless with It was far worse than the possibility of a quick death.

“Wait,” he cried, unwilling to concede to his fate. “W-wait, you can't! If It w-wakes u-up, it's not j-just going to come after me! It'll be all of y-you! Y-your c-children!”

“Giving it food is why it *hasn't* attacked our children!” one of the figures exclaimed. It sounded like the one who had expressed doubt earlier, but the high pitch of their voice made it hard to tell. “If we don't feed it, it'll kill them!”

“That's not it- it's been *sleeping*!” He managed to look over his shoulder at his assailants, his eyes wide and beseeching. “That's the o-only r-reason they're alive! As s-soon as it w-wakes up, it'll s-start k-killing again!”

“Ignore him,” said the gruff voice, and though Bill couldn't distinguish any features under their hood, he was picturing them as middle-aged man with stern features and a perpetual frown. They might have been grinning under there, revelling in Bill's distress. It was impossible to tell.

“If It wakes up, it'll start kuh-k-killing again,” he pleaded. “P-please, you h-have to l-listen to me-“

Two sets of hands heaved him to his knees and removed the rope twisted around his ankles. The bindings on his wrists remained.

Panic swept through Bill and evicted all rational thought from his mind, turning his pleading into incomprehensible yelling and his struggling into helpless thrashing. He didn't manage to dislodge their grip before being pulled over the mouth of the pipe and dropped inside.

His shoulders brushed along the wall of the pipe as he descended, dirt and grime catching on the back of his shirt until the pipe came to an abrupt end. What he landed upon wasn't the proposed pile of bodies, and nor was it hard ground – he landed in a good three feet's worth of water. The consistency of it was revolting, slimy and gunky, and he realized as he rose to his knees that he was sitting among shards of bone and rotting ligaments. There might have been muscles attached to the ligaments, once upon a time, but they were most certainly gone now.

There was not a hint of light anywhere in the tunnel. Bill rose to his feet, shaking like a leaf, and started to slosh his way in a random direction. He would have extended his arms before him to feel his way to an exit, but the rope prevented him from doing even that.

Somehow, despite little waste reaching this far, the smell down here was far worse than anything he'd been subjected to while above. His feet crunched over soft, bloated things, and occasionally what lurked beneath the water would expel such a rotten odour that Bill would gag. He hoped he didn't get a – what had Eddie called it? A staph infection? Despite all the times Eddie had trilled about it, Bill didn't actually know what a staph infection was.

He dragged an elbow along the wall as he walked, hoping desperately that following the circumference of the tunnels would lead him to safety. There had to be an exit, right? Surely the pipe he'd come through couldn't be the only way out. The water had to have come from somewhere, after all, and Bill just needed to find the source. Maybe, if he was lucky, he would find himself swept into a septic main and flung back out into the barrens. He could run back to his car, hop in, drive away, and forget this had ever happened. Provided the people that had kidnapped him hadn't decided to dispose of his car, that was.

The pipes were quiet save for the sound of dripping water. Bill listened carefully to his surroundings, anticipating the splash of an intruder and the hiss of parting water. He knew It would come eventually. The clown had to know he was here. It could probably smell him, smell the fear on him. It was in the sweat on his skin and the adrenaline in his veins, and It would be drawn to it like a moth to a flame.

His progress came to an abrupt stop as he went slamming into a wall.

“Long time, *no see*, B-B-Billy.”

Oh fuck. *Not* a wall.

He stumbled back, pulse fluttering wildly in his neck.

“Not going to say hello?” It asked, and the low, guttural quality of Its voice gave Bill pause. It sounded weak, just as It had when he and his friends had chased it into hibernation as children. It had not yet recovered from that encounter despite the passing of several years.

Bill would have liked to believe Its weakened state would provide him with enough of an advantage to beat it on his own, but Bill held no such delusions. In the dark, with no weapon, there was no doubt in his mind that he would lose in a physical altercation.

He threw himself to the side and propelled himself as fast as his legs would carry him down the tunnel. This time, however, he actually did go running into a wall, and it was a jarring enough impact to send him sprawling helplessly into the water.

It burst into loud, noxious laughter. “What do you think of the local cult?” It asked, trudging through the water toward him. Bill wasn't able to resume running before It curled a hand around the collar of his shirt and yanked him into Its arms. “I had them form shortly after *you* made a mess of my routine.” One of its taloned fingers scraped along the rope binding his wrists. “Oh, and they even *wrapped* you for me.”

“You're weak,” Bill said, trying for some bravery. “We h-hurt you bad last time. You haven't r-recovered.”

The mirth disappeared from Its voice. “I have rested. I have strength enough to deal with *you*.”

“Are you sure about that?” Despite the fact he was trapped, bound, and its grip on him was becoming uncomfortably tight, Bill’s voice was growing in volume and strength. “If you c-c-couldn’t beat me when I w-was a t-tiny t-twelve-year-old k-kid, why should I b-believe you can beat me now?” He elbowed it as hard as he could and was rewarded with a breathy, whining sound. It was followed by a furious snarl. “I’ll k-k-kill you b-before you k-kill me!”

“You,” It said. A single word, short and quick, but it carried with it an incredible amount of loathing and outrage. It had begun to shake with anger.

“Me, what?”

It inhaled. He could hear its breath whistling in past clenched teeth.

“You are a rude boy.”

“I’m not a ‘boy’,” he said. “I’m twenty-three.”

“*Boy*,” It snapped, throwing him into a nearby wall, its hands fisted in his shirt. The grime that had accumulated on the surface of the bricks slithered down Bill’s neck. “I’ve been around a long, *long* time, and do you know what I’ve learned?”

“Nothing?”

A palm jumped to his neck and applied pressure to his windpipe, a threat of what would come should he talk back again.

“Humans hate to be contaminated,” It said. The darkness receded as two luminous orange eyes flicked into being, illuminating the beast’s brow, nose, and lips. It didn’t look how Bill remembered it. At least, not exactly. It was as though someone shattered a ceramic mask and tried to glue all the pieces back together, using Its face as a base, but had missed essential fragments in the process. He could see squirming tendrils black behind the white, and there was enough of its jaw missing to leave its jagged teeth visible. The rest of It didn’t feel quite... together, either, and Bill was privately glad he had a limited view of Its body.

He jumped in surprise when a thumb slid beneath the first button of his plaid shirt and popped it off. Bill heard a ‘plunk’ as it landed in the water. “And they learn well through pain,” It finished, popping his second button.

Bill gave a nervous swallow. “I’m not afraid of you. If I’m n-not afraid-“

“Do you think that means I can’t hurt you?” It tittered. “Do you think I couldn’t *tear off your limbs* if I wanted to?”

Another button. Bill lifted a foot with the intention of slamming it into the clown’s gut, but he only succeeding in getting it trapped between their bodies as It moved closer.

“What’s wrong, B-B-Billy?” It grasped either side of his shirt and pulled it apart to unveil the pale skin beneath. Bill reflexively covered himself, throwing his forearms over his chest. They were knocked out of the way to make room for the sharp point of a claw. “No more clever remarks for me?”

“I really e-e-enjoyed hitting you in the face w-with that chain when I was a kid.”

It wrinkled its nose at him. The fine point of Its claw went sliding down his heaving chest, drawing a superficial red line into his pectoral. It was only when It reached the space above this thudding heart that It sunk in deep. The pain wasn’t so bad that it was intolerable, but it was bad enough to make Bill groan and writhe.

“Do you know what I am, Little Buddy?”

“An a-a-asshole,” he hissed.

Its next cut delved deeper.

“A God.”

Bill couldn’t stop himself from snorting at Its answer, and It responded by inflicting an even deeper cut, drawing forth a whimper. If it dug any further, It would surely hit bone.

“By your beings’ definition, not mine. I have no desire to be God to humans, but that is what-“ Its eyes flicked up. “They believe I am. Isn’t that *funny*?”

It wasn’t, really, but Bill didn’t get to say as much before It continued.

“But they have some things right. I am very old, and I am very wise, and I am very powerful.” Blood was gathering in the dips of his ribcage. “And I am eternal. I have always been here, and I always will be.”

“Wh-what are you really, then?” he asked. He didn’t expect an answer, and he wasn’t sure he wanted one, either.

A child’s mind could see It and know It and accept that It was part of their life without dwelling on the why’s and how’s of Its existence. But Bill was no longer a child. He no longer had the naivety to accept a creature like It as readily as he had accepted Santa Clause or the Tooth Fairy. It was more real, now, than it had ever been in his youth, and with that came terrifying implications: human beings weren’t alone on earth; monsters were real, and some of those monsters had a God complex and a taste for human flesh. When he thought about it, it made him feel small and insignificant, and very scared.

“I’ll show you.” It was tracing the lines it had made with Its talon, making them deeper and wider. “One day, Little Buddy, I’ll show you *everything*, and that everything will be your forever.” Bill didn’t have a wide enough scope of what It could do to imagine what It had in store for him, but the way It spoke those words, uncharacteristically soft, entrenched in promise, was enough to fill him with dread.

It leaned close enough that Bill could smell the decay in its gullet. Its tongue slid out of its toothy maw and laved over the cuts on his chest, eliciting a series of violent shivers. It was cold and slimy and It made Bill nauseous to think of that disgusting saliva seeping into his body through his cuts.

It licked until the wounds were clean, then trailed Its tongue up Bill's neck, over the pale expanse of his throat. When it came to his lips, It delved between them and gave him a taste of his own coppery blood.

"Do you understand what I'm saying, Billy?" It asked, catching his chin in Its claws, holding him still. Bill could see a smudge of his own blood on its jaw. "Answer me."

"You w-want to kill me-" he started, but it cut him off with a snarl.

"No, that would be too *merciful*. You will be as eternal as I, and I will indulge, and indulge, and indulge, in *you*." It pressed its palm, hard, to the cuts on his chest, making Bill wince. "Until your mind is as thin and threadbare as an old blanket, and even then I will continue, because I am not a creature that tires of indulging."

Bill shuddered.

"Do you understand what I'm saying?" It asked again, giving him a little shake. "Do you understand now?"

"Y-yes," he stuttered out, bravery dwindling. "Yes, I g-get it! Jesus Christ."

"Frightens you, doesn't it? I can *smell* it on you." It pressed Its nose to his cheek, inhaling. "Oh, but there *is* a way out. Do you want to know what it is, Little Buddy?"

"What?" Bill tried not to sound too hopeful.

"Defeat me," It said, and released him, leaving him to drop into the water. "Defeat me now, while you have the chance," It continued. "You can come down here as many times as you like. I'll even have my little dogsbodies leave you be."

This was such an odd proposition that it took Bill a good minute to process it. When he finally did, he shook his head. "I'm n-not an i-idiot. I'm n-not going to t-t-try to beat yu-y-you on my own."

It sneered. "No? You would be saving your friends pain and grief, and I know you like to play the *hero*."

It was right about that, as much as Bill would have liked to deny it. "W-why would you let me try?"

"Because, Little Buddy." Its voice dropped to a low rumble. "Each time you lose, I will take a little bit more of you. All those little things humans care so much about. Their pride, safety, cleanliness... humans hate to be contaminated, and I will contaminate every part of you. And then, and only then, will I show you All."

Bill's stomach turned at its wording. There were so many horrible ways one could be deprived of those things.

"Y-you could e-e-easily take me now," he said, his voice quiet. It wasn't an admittance he liked to make.

"I like to *play* with my food, and you would be good fun to play with."

It retreated into the dark of the tunnels, cutting neatly through the water.

"It's your choice, Little Buddy. Betray your friends, or indulge me in my games. Either way, the ending is the same."

And with that, Bill was alone.

He managed to find an exit after several hours of desperate searching. On his hands and knees, he crawled out the mouth of a pipe, dropping into a shallow hole full of trash and foul-smelling water. The moment his eyes had adjusted to the light, he looked down at his chest to see what It had drawn into his skin.

A series of symbols stood out stark on his pale skin. By sight alone, Bill could tell they weren't human in origin. He dragged his fingers over them, and the sharp pain that flared up at the gentle contact was accompanied by a chilling notion: *ownership*.

His car was where he'd left it. He tore a set of clean clothes out of his suitcase and changed, then sat in the driver's seat with hands on the wheel, contemplating his options... and resolved to fight It. He would fight it just a few times, to see if he could save his friends the agony It had promised. Whatever It took from him, if It had the opportunity to take anything at all, would be worth the sacrifice if he saved his friends even a little bit of pain.

His first attempt went poorly. He'd purchased a pistol with the intention of shooting it in the head, just as he had as a child, and managed to get it slapped out of his hands before he could pull the trigger. The gun dropped into the water and became lost among the fragments of corpses. Bill made no attempt to retrieve it, aware that it would be a waste of time.

He'd only managed to get in a few strikes to Its head before It had him pinned to the ground with one of Its palms grinding his cheek into the damp cavernous wall. He grappled uselessly at Its wrist.

He felt its lips by his ear, Its cool breath rolling over his cheek. "Pride," It whispered, and Its claws tore smoothly into his clothes, reducing them to tatters. He knelt naked in the water, horribly, painfully vulnerable and ashamed, and kept his head bowed low as It ran its hands over his neck and back, reaching for the base of his spine. Its rough skin drove a chill into his bones that would undoubtedly linger.

"Humility is good for the soul," It told him, Its voice punctuated with giggles.

When it had sufficiently humiliated him, It released him, allowing him to flee with a handful of what remained of his shirt. It was a long walk back to his hotel room.

The second attempt went moderately better. This time he managed to give it three hard hits with a pole before he was disarmed, and was half-way down the exit pipe before It managed to catch him by the back of his shirt and toss him to the ground. It clambered on top of him while he was still crawling along the metal. Bill could feel its skin shivering with anger.

“Safety,” It snarled, and suddenly it was Georgie on top of him, his yellow slicker blood-splattered and worn, crumpled up under his tiny, one-armed body. His blue eyes, the same shade of his own, twinkled under the light from the opening to Bill’s salvation.

“Why did you let me go outside, Bill?” Georgie asked, his voice soft and trembling and painfully familiar. The sound of it stretched his mind taut, fine links to rationality snapping under the weight of this new horror. “You sent me out there, and now I’m dead and it’s all your fault. Why did you send me out there? Why didn’t you come with me, Billy?”

“I didn’t k-know!” he found himself wailing. “I d-d-didn’t k-know this would h-happen!”

“It’s your fault,” Georgie cried. “It’s your fault! It’s your fault! It’s your fault!”

Bill returned to his hotel room utterly defeated, curling up under the covers of his bed and sobbing into his knees until sleep claimed him.

His third attempt was the most successful by far, ending with a knife embedded deep into Its left eye. There were whimpers among its animalistic snarling, and Bill’s desire to fight was renewed.

He held onto this small victory as it pinned him to the wall and whispered against his lips.

“Cleanliness.”

Its tongue ravaged his mouth and Its talons dug into his hips, drawing their bodies close together, a leg slipping between his shaking thighs. His trousers were tenting before It had even begun to apply pressure.

His victory receded in an instant, replaced with disgust. Not with what It was doing to him, but with himself, for *wanting* it.

“You should be disgusted,” It murmured, grinding Its leg against his arousal. Bill had to fight back a moan. “What sort of person wants *this*?”

Apparently, whatever kind of person Bill was.

Upon returning home, he stepped into the shower and stood under a cold spray until his cock had turned flaccid.

The cycle repeated.

“Pride,” It said, forcing him to kneel at Its feet, his burning face cradled to Its thigh. The chill of Its skin radiated through Its trousers.

“Submission suits you,” It rumbled, dragging its fingers through his coarse auburn hair. It had lost a sizable amount of Its face during their encounter and now beamed down at him with its teeth visible through both sides of its jaw. The sight was not a pleasant one. Disturbing and macabre, in fact, and Bill couldn’t look at It long before being overwhelmed by the need to divert his eyes.

Its hand trailed down to the nape of his neck, playing with the fine hairs there. They always stood up on end in Its presence. “How many more times are you going to try, hm?”

“As many as I need to,” he replied, without even pausing to think.

It guffawed. “Well then, you’re going to be in Derry a while.”

It was only a week after this comment that Bill started looking at house prices.

“Safety.”

The bullet hole in Its leg leaked wisps of black as It hunched over him and grasped his head in both hands, forcing him to look up into the face of his father. It didn’t let him squeeze his eyes shut, prying them open with Its thumbs. “You were right, Bill,” said Zack Denbrough. “You were always right. We only ever loved you when Georgie was there. With him gone, we didn’t need to pretend anymore.”

The way It smiled down at him was almost kind. Bill couldn’t remember the last time he’d seen such an expression on his father’s face.

“We always blamed you for letting your brother go outside, Bill. Always.”

Bill’s blood turned to ice. He did not shriek, as he had before, but sobbed so hard that he could almost feel the little pieces of him It had threatened to extract starting to dislodge.

It took him several long, miserable days to find the courage to return.

“Cleanliness.”

Bill was kneeling among the remnants of the dead with Its chest pressed flush to his back. It was shuddering with the force of Its panting breaths, Its hand coiled around Bill’s cock, fondling him into hardness. It seemed to be enjoying their intimacy just as much, if not more so than Bill was.

“You are sick, Little Buddy,” It growled into his ear, glove wet with precum. “Sick and dirty.”

“C’mon,” he murmured, mindless in his desire. He hated himself a little less if he let himself get lost in it. “Stroke me properly, you asshole.”

“Say please.”

Its talented fingers teased the sensitive head of his cock and he bucked into Its hand. “Please,” he breathed.

He didn’t just shower when he returned home. He stood under a spray of cold water and scrubbed himself until every inch of his skin was angry and pink, paying particular attention to his genitals. He was so furious with himself that he could have cried, but he’d shed enough tears lately, and he hadn’t the strength to do it again.

Why did he keep on doing this? He was losing. He had lost. It had beaten him, humiliated him, sullied him, and stripped him of his self-respect, and It didn’t appear to be getting any weaker through his efforts. No matter what he did, It would always be whole again for their next encounter. Bill couldn’t claim the same thing.

So why didn’t he just stop? It had given him that option. It would let him leave Derry if he so desired. All he had to do was hop into his car and drive home and he wouldn’t have to think about this again for another sixteen years. It would be so easy to surrender. The Losers would surely understand, should they ever find out.

But he stayed. He stayed in Derry, bought a house, started a new novel, and descended into the sewer at sporadic periods to face It. Each time he was sure *this* plan would be the one, *this* plan was perfect, *this* plan would defeat It once and for all, and each time he was proven wrong. But he stayed, anyway, and continued trying.

After two months of fighting It, he started to wonder how much was left for It to take.

Bill reached a new low when It took him against the sewer wall and murmured into his ear, “You’re doing well,” and instead of something appropriate, like anger or shame, he felt a pathetic swell of hope.

It walked him to the exit that day, watching him from the mouth of the pipe until he had reached his car.

“Aren’t you tired?” It asked.

At this point, tired was an understatement. Bill had lost count of how many times they had fought. He only knew the number was higher than twenty, but lower than fifty, and that he hadn’t won a single altercation.

“Yeah,” he answered, shrugging. He was knee-deep in sewage water, his head damp with blood. It had slammed him into a wall after he’d sprayed It with potent pepper spray. The pepper spray container now lay at the bottom of the tunnel, damaged beyond use. “But if I don’t keep going, this’ll all h-have been for nothing.”

He didn’t protest when It picked his battered body off the ground and cradled him to Its chest, carrying him into depths of the sewer he had yet to traverse. They sat against the wall of a brightly lit room and Bill dozed, lulled toward sleep by the thudding behind Its breastbone. Did it even have a heart? It certainly had something, though it didn’t quite sound like the rhythmic beats of blood being pumped through one’s body.

“Pride,” It murmured, but it didn’t do anything. Merely sat stroking his back and hair, allowing him to rest.

Their following encounters ended in a similar fashion, and Bill started to notice it no longer utilised the faces of those he had failed in Its extractions of ‘safety’. Perhaps it recognised that Bill was hanging on by a thread and wanted to extend his suffering. That seemed like the sort of thing it would do. Either way, he was finding their new encounters far more tolerable than their old ones.

“Why do you eat c-children?”

“I eat adults, too.”

“Fine. Why do you eat hu-h-humans?”

“They are necessary sustenance.” It dragged its tongue over its incisors. The hint of pink on them concerned Bill. “And *delicious*.”

“Couldn’t you eat animals?” asked Bill. “A-animals get scared. S-scare some cows and eat those.”

It wrinkled its nose in distaste. “Humans taste better. Delicious, tasty humans.”

“Have you e-even tried a cow before?”

It grunted.

“Y-yeah, didn’t t-think so,” he muttered, leaning back against Its chest, too fatigued to resist Its tight grip on him. They were back in the bright room. He still hadn’t figured out where the light was coming from. “You should eat a cow.”

“I do not want to.”

“But you should.”

“No.”

“W-when I win, I’m m-making you eat a cow.”

It grunted again. “You will not win.”

The next time he and It interacted, it was at the behest of the local cult. They had accosted Bill on his way to the grocery store and dragged him into the dark of the sewer, tossing him unceremoniously into the hole. He had, to his great surprise, landed in Its arms rather than the water.

“I win,” It announced, and Bill scoffed.

“We d-didn’t even fight.”

“Your hands are tied. I win.”

Bill attempted to batter It with said tied hands and was quickly subdued.

“I win,” It said again, sloshing Its way down the tunnel with Bill held beneath Its chin, Its fingers coiled around Bill’s bound wrists. When Bill tried to headbutt It, It bit at his ear in warning.

“I thought you s-said you w-weren’t going to s-send those psychos a-after me,” Bill said, finally yielding to Its grip. There didn’t seem to be much point in resisting. Even in Its weakened state, It was still vastly stronger than him.

“I did, didn’t I,” It mused. “But you had not been down here for several days, so I sent for you.”

“I n-needed some time t-to recover.”

“I do not like to be kept waiting.”

Bill rolled his eyes. “Yeah, I can t-tell.”

For an uncomfortable, lengthy period, It examined him, the ethereal glow of Its eyes bathing their faces in a gentle light.

“Don’t leave me waiting again.”

The warning note in Its voice provoked a shiver.

For the first time since proposing their arrangement, It came to visit him. It came as not a clown, but as a human with bright orange eyes and slick ginger hair, dressed in an all-black suit ensemble. At six foot five, It still towered over Bill, who regarded It warily from his kitchen counter. He’d been in the middle of cutting up vegetables for a stew, which Bill thought fortuitous as he didn’t have to lunge for a weapon.

When It smiled, Bill saw jagged white teeth.

“Little Buddy,” It greeted. It was odd to hear such an otherworld voice coming out of a normal (if colourful) looking man.

The line of Bill’s shoulders stiffened. “*What?* W-why are you here?”

“Good question,” It said, taking slow, calculated steps into the room, Its gaze lingering on Bill. The dress shoes It wore were shiny and clean. “I knew a man named Robert Gray, once. This was their body. Not their suit, mind you; this was plucked from *you*.”

Bill gave a nervous lick of his lips and coiled his fingers tight around the handle of his knife, keeping it out of view. Only if It got closer would he brandish it.

“You steal bodies now?” His stomach clenched fearfully when he thought of It taking his. It could deceive his friends, if It did that. It could hurt the few people in his life that he cared about. “I thought you just *ate* them.”

“Oh, I *did* eat him,” It said, laughing boisterously. Now It was advancing on Bill. “I *savoured* that man and I told him how much he had helped me before he died. He liked clowns, you see! And I learned to like them, too.”

Bill took a step back, glancing around for some means of creating a barricade. With some effort, he could probably throw the fridge down. It was a cheap one and small enough that he’d been able to wheel it into his house without assistance. “So you’re a creep. That’s already pretty well established.”

“Sure am, Little Buddy!” It was getting closer, and closer, and Bill had begun to involuntarily hold his breath. “But my point is...” It spread a hand over Its clavicle. “I am a creature that *adapts*.”

Bill’s palm was turning slick around the handle of his knife. He raised it into view, throat bobbing around an anxious swallow. “So?” he asked, perplexed and frightened.

“So, I have a new proposition.”

“What?”

“A new pro-po-sit-ion.” It paused between each syllable. “You want to hear it or not, Billy boy? I’m not adverse to returning to our earlier arrangement.”

It was so close now that Bill could have impaled It on the knife. The tip of the blade tapped a dark button on its dress shirt.

“What is it?” He raised the blade to press it to the hollow of Its throat. Its skin was almost bone white. “If you’re going to ask for my b-body or some shit, you can forget it. I know you’d just kill me and go after my fr-f-friends.”

“I actually do want your body-“ It raised a hand to forestall interruption. “But not as a meal, and not as a puppet.”

“What, then?”

“I *own* you, Little Buddy. I said I would take all of you, and I have. But...” It stepped even closer, grunting as the knife pierced Its flesh. Bill retracted his weapon just enough to avoid grievous harm. He didn’t want to get into a fight here, if he could help it. “I want you to want me to own you,” It finished.

Bill guffawed. “Is that a pr-p-prerequisite to whatever sick shit you want to do to me or something? Some sort of ‘monster guideline’?”

Its mouth pulled into a deep frown. “No. No. I want you.” It pointed at Bill. “To want me.” It pointed at itself. “The way *I* want *you*.”

The small of Bill’s back hit the edge of the counter as It pressed him into a corner, its long arms boxing him in.

“Want me,” It said, as though It could simply demand such a thing of another person. “Want. Me.”

“Jesus Christ,” Bill breathed. “I-it almost sounds like you’re t-t-trying to ask me out, b-but in the most creepy, c-convoluted way possible.”

“I want you to *want me*,” It said again. “I’m wearing this vessel *for you*. You like ginger hair – I have ginger hair. You like tall men – I am tall.”

“I don’t like tall men,” he said, spluttering.

It snorted. “You like tall men, Billy. I know you do, and I am tall.”

“Oh Christ, you *are* trying to ask me out, aren’t you?”

“And you are accepting.”

“I haven’t- I...” Bill lowered his knife to the kitchen counter, hesitating before he let it slide out of his hand. There didn’t seem to be any need for it right now. Had It wanted to harm him, It would have done so by now. “Are you sure you’re not just getting...” He paused. “Uh... *emotional* b-because of the great sex?”

“No,” It said simply. “But upon choosing a mate, *it is* a lifelong commitment for my kind.”

“Okay. Oh boy.” Bill fidgeted with the sleeves of his shirt. “So, you spent – it’s been six months, so you spent six months torturing me, and you expect me to want to reciprocate whatever the hell you’re offering? I think even you are c-capable of recognizing how *a-absurd* that is.”

Its frowned deepened even further. “You said we had great sex.”

Bill couldn’t *believe* they were having this conversation. A wise man would have absconded by now, but Bill was simply too bewildered to do anything more than keep on stumbling along. “Sex isn’t really a good basis for a relationship.” There was also the small issue of It being an interdimensional beast that had killed his brother and regularly slaughtered the children of Derry.

“There is nothing more important than indulgence,” It said.

“For you, maybe, b-but I t-tend to go for m-mutual respect and e-e-enjoyment of each o-others company.”

“Trivialities,” It said with a flap of Its hand.

There was saliva gathering on its bottom lip, dripping slowly down its chin. Bill reached for the roll of paper towels he kept by the kettle and handed a handful to It. Instead of using them, It merely stared at them, confused.

“For y-your mouth.”

It dabbed at its lips. “This is reciprocation,” It said, much to Bill’s dismay.

“What? No, I just didn’t want you to get drool on my-“

“Reciprocation,” It insisted. “Because you do want me.”

“I *don’t* want you,” Bill shot back. “And I never will. You tortured me. You killed my brother.”

“You do, and you will,” It said, full of conviction.

“That d-doesn’t make any sense!” Bill cried, exasperated.

It was undeterred by his clear dismay. “Continue coming to my sewer, Little Buddy.” It took a step back, throwing the sullied paper towels into the sink. “We have new stakes.”

Bill threw up his hands in frustration. “Fine, I w-will! But not b-because I want you.”

“You *do* want me, and I’ll make you admit it,” It said, and withdrew a stunning red balloon from behind Itself, pressing it into Bill’s fingers. He thoughtlessly closed his hand around the curly white ribbon.

“If I go down there, it’ll be to *fight* you.”

“It’s a date,” It said, and disappeared out his kitchen door.

Bill spluttered in disbelief, balloon still clutched tight in his hand.

What the fuck had just happened?

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